GOVERNMENT, LISTEN TO LOCAL VOICES! IMPLEMENT EU PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION TO PROTECT THE ECONOMY, GREEN JOBS

Oil-affected communities whose land, cultural, livelihood and other rights are abused. These abuses undermine green economic activities such as agriculture.

The European Parliament adopts a resolution condemning the EACOP project. Photo credit: Les Amis de la Terre

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Dear reader, welcome to our September 2022 newsletter. On September 14, 2022, the European Parliament passed a resolution asking the governments of Uganda and Tanzania together with TotalEnergies to delay construction of the East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP) project for one year.

In the resolution, Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) took note of the human rights violations under and the environmental as well as climate change risks posed by the EACOP project.

They also took note of the criminalisation of environmental and human rights defenders (EHRDs) who speak out against the project.

The MEPs called on the EACOP project developers to protect the environment and to put an end to the extractive activities in protected and sensitive ecosystems.

They also urged the EACOP project developers to resolve all disputes that should have been resolved prior to the launch of the EACOP project.

Furthermore, they urged TotalEnergies to take one year to study the feasibility of an alternative route for the EACOP project to better safeguard protected and sensitive ecosystems as well as the water resources of Uganda and Tanzania.

Following the above resolution, public debate ensued.

While many stakeholders supported the European Parliament resolution, the Ugandan government called on the EU to respect Uganda’s sovereignty.

Government observed that it would push ahead with the project.

In this newsletter however, AFIEGO and our partners make a case for government to listen to the European Parliament and prioritise environmental conservation as well as climate action over oil exploitation.

This is because oil exploitation stands to affect Uganda’s most important economic sectors including agriculture, fisheries, tourism and clean energy among others that employ the majority of Ugandans while contributing the most to the country’s GDP.

To promote prosperity for all, the Ugandan government must prioritise the above green economic sectors. Read more about this in our Word from CEO and partners.

In this newsletter, we also bring you our pictorial section.

In the section, we highlight the activities that we and our partners implemented this month.

For instance, we supported communities in Buliisa district whose property was destroyed due to ‘floods’ from the Tilenga Industrial Area to issue a press statement and...
engage the media.

This was aimed at creating pressure on TotalEnergies to address the flooding’s impacts on communities.

In addition, we organised a planning and reflection meeting for our Just Energy Transition (JET) project Uganda partners. The meeting enabled us reflect on the project’s milestones and challenges that need to be addressed in 2023.

Furthermore, we joined our Green Livelihoods Alliance (GLA) project partners in Uganda in a planning and reflection meeting. During the meeting, we took stock of the project’s milestones and challenges.

In addition, we hosted a delegation from Oilwatch Africa during their solidarity visit to Uganda.

During the visit, the members documented the human rights violations, criminalisation of EHRDs and other violations in the oil sector.

The delegation shared experiences and engaged various stakeholders to enable EHRDs operate despite the repressed civic space in Uganda.

We also supported our staff to participate in an African Environmental Defenders’ reflection meeting that was organised by our partners. You will read about this and more in our pictorial.

In our lobbying section, we share some of the lobby and advocacy products that we disseminated this month.

For instance, we supported the EACOP-affected communities of Bunyoro and Greater Masaka to petition TotalEnergies to address their grievances.

In addition, with over 100 civil society groups, we wrote to the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) expressing concerns over financing of the EACOP project.

We also issued a press statement to mobilise the media to report on our concerns.

Finally, in the media section, we bring you some of the over ten newspaper articles written by our staff and partners that were published in the leading newspapers in September.

We hope you enjoy the newsletter.

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Dear reader, ever since the European Parliament passed a resolution on the violation of human rights in Uganda and Tanzania linked to fossil fuel projects on September 14, 2022, public debate around the resolution has been huge.

In the resolution, the European parliament took note of the human rights violations and the climate change as well as environmental risks associated with exploitation of Uganda’s oil resources including in protected areas such as Murchison Falls National Park. The European parliament also discussed the clamping down on critical Ugandan voices that speak out against oil exploitation in the country.

The parliament called for the protection of human rights as well as avoidance of oil exploitation in protected areas and sensitive ecosystems. The parliament also urged TotalEnergies to stop development of the East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP) project for a year to find an alternative route that has a small environmental footprint.

While large sections of the Ugandan public including politicians, conservationists, climate change activists, youth, civil society groups and the general public welcomed the resolution, the Ugandan government spoke out against it.

Government noted that as a sovereign country, Uganda has a right to develop its resources and together with its partners including TotalEnergies and China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC), it will go ahead to develop the EACOP project.

While it is true that the Ugandan government has a right to develop the country’s resources for the benefit of its people, it is best that government listens to the European parliament. Why?

Well, the oil and gas industry is a precarious one. Many countries, especially in Africa, that have developed the industry have seen their environmental resources being polluted and economic activities being decimated. On its part, Uganda’s oil exploitation dreams stand to hurt key green economic sectors such as agriculture, tourism, clean energy, fisheries and others that employ the majority of Ugandans and contribute the most to Uganda’s GDP. How so?

We explain below.

WHAT UGANDA STANDS TO LOSE

a) Disruption of households and impact on young people: In 2012, the Ugandan government through the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Development (MEMD) displaced over 7,000 people including 3,500 women, 1,500 children and others from over 29 square kilometres of their land in Kabaale-Hoima district. Currently, the land is being used by government to build an airport.

The land is also expected to host an industrial park. Oil for a planned refinery and that to be transported by the EACOP will be separated at this industrial park. The massive displacement in 2012 caused and continues to cause untold suffering to the affected communities.

This is because the communities received delayed, unfair and inadequate compensation that resulted into collapse of schools, children dropping out of school, delays to resettle the affected people for over six years, denying some families including female-headed ones houses, forcing people into a camp and other problems. In 2014, some of the affected people filed a case in the High Court of Uganda to stop the above injustices.
but to date, the court is yet to conclude their case for redress. These problems continue to happen in all oil affected communities. How do these impact household incomes and the Ugandan economy?

b) Land rights abuses and agriculture:
To develop infrastructure for the Tilenga, Kingfisher and EACOP oil projects, the oil companies in Uganda and government are acquiring land from tens of thousands of households, much like they did from the aforementioned over 7,000 people. This has an impact on the affected people’s capacity to contribute to Uganda’s economy, and their household incomes.

How? Cut-off dates stopping project-affected people from using their land to grow perennial food and cash crops are set on the affected people’s properties.

Delays to compensate the people amidst these land use restrictions are seen. This means that the households do not grow perennial food and cash crops such as coffee, bananas, cassava and others. Income losses occur as a result. The majority of the affected households are farmers. Moreover, research by AFIEGO shows that communities that are paid delayed compensation, a challenge that most oil-affected households face, are unable to replace all their land, undermining their capacity to engage in agriculture.

The agricultural sector contributes nearly 40% to Uganda’s GDP. Smallholder farmers such as the tens of thousands affected by oil projects contribute to this GDP. To protect the economy therefore, it is paramount to listen to the European Parliament when it calls for respect of human rights.

c) Economic risks of climate change:
African countries, including Uganda, have been disproportionately affected by the climate change crisis, the February 2022 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report confirms. The climate crisis has been largely caused by the burning of fossil fuels. When burnt, the oil transported by the EACOP will result in the production of up to 34.3 million metric tonnes of carbon per year for 20 to 25 years.

Climate change is a challenge to Uganda’s economic growth. Uganda’s Updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) of September 2022 identify the agriculture, energy, tourism and other sectors as being some of the most vulnerable to climate change. The above economic sectors are some of the biggest, employing over 70% of Uganda’s labourforce. With investments in the oil sector, Uganda is endangering economic sectors that employ millions. Yet the oil sector will create only 13,000 direct jobs at peak, a figure that experts have said could be inflated.

d) Climate change risks to GDP:
Uganda’s Ministry of Water and Environment has sounded the warning bell when it comes to climate change. The ministry says that if no action is taken to address the climate change crisis, Uganda could spend $273 - 437 billion on climate change costs between 2010 and 2050. This cost is higher than the less than $ 20 billion that Uganda expects to earn from oil in 25 years. In March 2020, the World Bank estimated that Uganda could earn oil revenues of $800 million per year at peak production, translating into less than $ 20 billion over 25 years of oil production. Moreover, the Ministry of Water and Environment says that the climate change costs in Uganda could rise to 10% of Uganda’s GDP by 2100.

e) Biodiversity impacts and tourism:
Oil exploitation activities are taking place in Uganda’s protected areas, such as Murchison Falls National Park (MFNP). The park is one of Uganda’s oldest, largest and most visited. By virtue of this, it can be argued that the park substantially contributes to Uganda’s tourism
earnings, which peaked at $1.6 billion in 2018. These earnings are more than the $800 million per year that Uganda is expected to earn from oil at peak production.

Yet the oil sector stands to hurt tourism as habitat destruction, loss of feeding grounds, pollution and others are being seen because of oil exploitation activities in MFNP and the wider Albertine Graben.

In Uganda’s National Development Plan III, the Ugandan government identified tourism as one of the country’s priority sectors, noting that the sector remains one of the best performing.

The Ugandan government set targets of increasing the tourism sector’s earnings to $1.862 billion and the share of GDP to 8.5% by 2024/2025. To aid achievement of these targets, it is best that the Ugandan government listens to local voices and implements recommendations such as those of European Parliament that prioritise environmental conservation.

f) Threats to clean energy aspirations: Oil exploitation is also threat to Uganda’s clean energy aspirations, and the country’s ambitions to reduce its greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 24.7% by 2030. The above is because oil and gas production would likely hamper energy transition efforts as Ugandans will need to provide a market for the country’s oil and gas.

Furthermore, Uganda’s energy sector is one of the most vulnerable to climate change impacts, with hydropower dams, which are the country’s biggest energy sources, being put at risk of silting, dry conditions and other risks.

g) Environmental risks and fisheries: The oil sector in Uganda has affected major rivers and Lakes such as River Nile, Lake Albert, Lake Victoria and others. Communities in Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) rely on these rivers and lakes to make a living through fishing among others. In fact, lakes Victoria and Albert provide 82.9% of the fish in Uganda. Further, the fisheries sector earned Uganda $118.6 million between June 2020 and July 2021. The lakes also provide some of over 5 million fisheries sector jobs in Uganda. The oil sector puts these earnings and jobs at risk.

h) Burgeoning public debt: Uganda has become highly indebted and by June 2022, Uganda’s public debt stood at Shs. 79 trillion ($20.8 billion). By the same period, Uganda’s debt to GDP ratio was projected to rise to 51.6%. Uganda’s 2020 Debt Sustainability report indicated that Uganda’s debt had burgeoned due to borrowing to invest in the oil, gas and infrastructure sectors, among others. Economic experts have already expressed fear that Uganda could experience the oil curse due to borrowing in anticipation of oil revenues. It is prudent therefore to assess the economic risks vis-à-vis the benefits of the oil sector before continued investments.

CONCLUSION
Ordinary Ugandans stand to lose out on jobs, food security and clean water access among others due to Uganda’s oil exploitation activities. The Ugandan government also stands to see the economy being negatively impacted as the oil sector and climate change could affect the country’s most prosperous economic activities.

It is therefore best that the Ugandan government listens to local voices and the European Parliament and addresses human rights violations as well as protects the environment to ensure a thriving economy.

By CEO and Partners
AFIEGO HOSTS OILWATCH AFRICA TEAM MEMBERS

On September 6, 2022, AFIEGO hosted a delegation from Oilwatch Africa at AFIEGO’s office in Kampala.

During the meeting, the OilWatch Africa team including members from Nigeria shared their countries’ oil production experience.

The meeting enabled AFIEGO staff to understand the impacts oil production could have on the environment.

AFIEGO SUPPORTS OILWATCH AFRICA TO VISIT OIL-AFFECTED COMMUNITIES

In addition to the above, on September 7, 2022, AFIEGO supported the Oilwatch Africa delegation to visit oil-affected communities.

This visit enabled the delegation to assess the human rights situation of the communities and to share experiences to enable the communities to protect their rights.

AFIEGO also supported the delegation to visit human rights defenders’ bodies and other CSOs in Uganda.

AFIEGO CAMPAIGNS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS PROTECTION & ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION IN DEBATE ON EACOP

In September 2022, AFIEGO participated in over five media discussions on the European Parliament resolution on the EACOP project.

During the discussions, AFIEGO made a case for prioritisation of human rights and environmental conservation over the EACOP project.
AFIEGO SUPPORTS TILenga-AFFECTED COMMUNITIES TO MOBILISE PUBLIC PRESSURE TO PROTECT THEIR RIGHTS

On September 15, 2022, AFIEGO supported communities whose property in Buliisa district was destroyed due to floods from the Tilenga Industrial Area to mobilise public pressure for addressing of their grievances.

After the communities held a protest in Buliisa, we supported them to engage the media to mobilise the public pressure.

AFIEGO AND PARTNERS IN PLANNING AND REFLECTION MEETINGS

Between September 13 and 15, 2022, AFIEGO and our partners under the Just Energy Transition (JET) and Green Livelihoods Alliance-Uganda programme participated in reflection and planning meetings in Kampala.

We reflected on the milestones registered in 2022 and identified areas and strategies that will guide implementation of the projects in 2023.

AFIEGO JOINS PARTNERS AT THE AFRICAN ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENDERS’ REFLECTION MEETING

Between September 27 and 28, 2022, AFIEGO joined our partners in the African Environmental Defenders reflection meeting in Nairobi.

The reflection meeting provided a safe space for networking, capacity building and reflection on the experiences of frontline African environmental defenders.
In September 2022, AFIEGO supported the EACOP-affected communities of Bunyoro and Greater Masaka to petition TotalEnergies to address their grievances. Further, we supported Tilenga oil project host communities to issue a press statement detailing the impact of ‘flooding’ from the Tilenga Industrial Area on communities.

In addition, we joined over 100 CSOs and issued a press statement as well as a CSO letter to Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) expressing concerns over financing of the EACOP project.
This month, AFIEGO staff, research associates and youth champions wrote over ten newspaper articles that were published in the leading newspapers. The media also published articles from the media interviews we held this month. Some of the published articles are captured below.
About Africa Institute for Energy Governance (AFIEGO)

AFIEGO is a non-profit company limited by guarantee that was incorporated under Uganda’s Companies Act. AFIEGO undertakes public policy research and advocacy to influence energy policies to benefit the poor and vulnerable. Based in Kampala-Uganda, the non-profit company was born out of the need to contribute to efforts to turn Africa’s clean energy potential into reality and to ensure that the common man and woman benefit from this energy boom. Through lobbying, research and community education, AFIEGO works with communities and leaders to ensure that clean energy resources are utilised in a way that promotes equitable development, environmental conservation and respect for human rights.

Our Vision
A society that equitably uses clean energy resources for socio-economic development

Our Mission
To promote energy policies that benefit poor and vulnerable communities

Upcoming events

October 3, 2022; Regional: Meeting to discuss the EACOP case at the East African Court of Justice

October 10, 2022; Kampala: Commissioning of research on the impact of oil activities on forests in the Albertine Graben

October 14, 2022; Bunyoro and Greater Masaka: Radio talkshows on relevance of the European parliament resolution to communities

October 17, 2022; Hoima: Community sensitisation meeting on the importance of clean energy in addressing the climate change crisis

October 21, 2022; Kampala: Dissemination of a research brief on pro-poor energy policies for promotion of off-grid electrification

October 28, 2022; Cross-border: Webinar on operating in restricted civic spaces